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ABSTRACT

A study asked five specific questions about gender roles and the structure of the family. Participants, 108 female and 61 male students (between 17 and 56 years of age), enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses completed questionnaires as fulfillment of optional course credits. Participants were asked to define their families based on their family of origin and to complete two forms of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory--one to assess how the individual describes his or her own gender role and the other to assess how the individual describes the ideal person's gender role. Differences for personal and ideal gender role beliefs were not found between individuals reared in single-parent and intact families. However, while students from single-parent homes saw the societal ideal as being evenly divided between sex-typed (masculine-feminine) and androgynous roles, students from intact homes were more apt to define themselves as sex-typed (masculine). That is to say, individuals reared in single-parent homes were more apt to categorize the societal ideal as androgynous. Further examination of the results revealed that females from intact families stereotyped the ideal person as feminine, whereas males from intact families stereotyped the ideal person as masculine. Further studies should be performed to identify the relations between a child's personal gender roles and those gender roles modeled in the home. Contains 3 tables of data and 21 references. (BT)

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Gender Role Differences in Students of Single-Parent and Intact Families

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Gender Role Differences in Students of Single-Parent and Intact Families

Gender roles are beliefs about the ways in which individual, familial, community, and societal roles are divided by gender. Gender role attitudes have been historically defined as being either masculine or feminine (Bem, 1974; Williams, Radin, & Allegro, 1992). Many have stereotyped masculinity as being independent and dominant, while femininity has been traditionally stereotyped as submissive and sensitive (Bem, 1975, 1985). The current study will explore three specifics of gender roles: the person's perceptions of their own gender roles (personal gender roles), the person's perceptions of socially idealized gender roles (ideal gender roles), and the fit between an individual's personal and ideal gender roles.

Parents are important models of gender roles (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980; Williams et al., 1992). One of the main functions of parents and family is to serve as a socialization system, by which children are taught traditional values and behavior (Glass, Bengtson, & Dunham, 1986). Parents socialize children by modeling gender-appropriate behaviors and attitudes (Chodorow, 1978; Glass et al., 1986; Williams et al., 1992).

Significant differences exist in the gender roles of family members of single-parent families and intact families (Amato & Booth, 1991; Wallerstein, 1991). Developmental, social, and

behavioral changes in children are thought to be the result of changes in economic and caretaking roles for parents in single-parent families (Hess & Camara, 1979; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1977, 1985; Kalter, 1987; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976, 1980). Mothers who used to be primary caregivers are busy with professional careers, and fathers who used to be at their jobs may be found at home more often (Amato & Booth, 1991; Katz, 1989).

Being reared in a family with one primary parent may lead children to examine whether a parent's socialized roles are masculine or feminine. Differences between personal roles and idealized social roles are also thought to be a result of growing up with one parent. The flexibility of roles present in growing up with one primary parent may lead children to disregard sex-typed roles that are generally seen by society as being acceptable. Children reared in single-parent homes will have experiences that do not match those valued by our society (e.g. - sex typed, stereotyped interactions). Children from intact families are more apt to have the same personal and ideal roles because their family experience will match experiences valued by our society.

Katz (1989) believes that single-parent family systems lead to more flexible views of gender roles because children from single-parent families identify their primary parent as being

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both maternal and paternal. Such flexible ideas have been defined by Bem (1974, 1981a) as being androgynous in nature, which is the incorporation of masculine and feminine characteristics. Androgynous individuals are thought to be more situationally flexible, using a gender role based on whether or not it is most appropriate for that setting (Bem, 1981a).

Furthermore, social and economic changes experienced by children of single-parent families may affect their perceptions of their parents' roles (Peck, 1988-89; Wallerstein, 1991; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1976, 1980). Children from single-parent families are typically reared by a mother who works and raises her children, while children from intact homes have two parents who divide these responsibilities. Intact families have been found to divide these responsibilities based on socially-identified gender roles (Katz, 1989). Because of these differences, children of single-parent families may hold more androgynous or flexible gender role perceptions when compared to children from intact homes, or even children from father-headed single-parent families (Amato & Booth, 1991; Kurdek & Siesky, 1980; Mason & Bumpass, 1975). Since most children of single-parent families live in mother-headed/maternally employed households, they may also be more likely than children in father-headed single-parent families to have androgynous societal views. Single parents are more likely than parents in intact families to

have nontraditional roles.

Understanding the differences between intact families, mother-headed families and father-headed families is important. Gender role flexibility and higher levels of androgyny may alter the future behaviors, attitudes, relationships, and self-concepts of these individuals (Bem, 1981a).

In the current study, five specific questions were asked of gender roles and the structure of the family. Students reared in single-parent families were expected to hold more androgynous personal gender role beliefs that students reared in intact families. Second, students reared in single-parent families were expected to hold more androgynous ideal gender role beliefs that students reared in intact families. Third, students reared in single-parent families were believed to be more similar on personal and ideal gender roles than individuals reared in intact families. Fourth, individuals reared in mother-headed families were believed to hold more androgynous personal gender roles than students reared in father-headed households. Finally, individuals reared in mother-headed families were thought to hold more androgynous ideal gender roles than students reared in father-headed households.

Method

Participants

Participants for the current study were 108 female and 61

male students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at a university and a community college in the midwest. Participants completed questionnaires as fulfillment of optional course credits. Participants' ages ranged from 17 years of age to 56 years of age, with the median falling at 19 years. Participants were asked to define their families based on their family of origin. Of the 169 students sampled in this study, 108 were from intact families, whereas 59 were from single-parent families. Two subjects did not define their family status, and were removed from further analysis (see Table 1). Of the subjects sampled, 125 were Caucasian, 30 were African-American, 12 were Asian-American, and 2 were Hispanic-American.

Participants' socieo-economic status was defined based on their family of origin's current yearly income. Socieo-economic status ranged from $20,000 to $150,000, with a median income of $34,000.

In order to assure that differences in gender roles between participants from single-parent families and intact families were attributable to individuals being reared in those families, participants in single-parent and intact families were paired based on gender, age, race, and socieo-economic status. 56 pairs resulted (41 female pairs, 37 male pairs; 40 Caucasian pairs, 16 African-American pairs, 3 Asian-American pairs). The pairs were divided between college-aged (17-22) and post-college aged (23-

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27), with a median age of 19. Level of income was divided between working class ($10,000 to $30,000), middle class ($31,000 to $60,000), and the economically advantaged ($61,000 to $120,000), with a median of $34,000. The remaining participants were not used in the analyses.

Insert Table 1 Here

Procedure

Participants were asked to complete two forms of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory: one used to assess how the individual describes their own gender roles (Personal gender roles), and the other used to assess how the individual describes the ideal person's gender roles (Ideal gender roles). Demographic data, such as socieo-economic status, status of family (single-parent or intact), and race were assessed via a questionnaire. Each subject completed the questionnaires in the following order: personal gender role questionnaire, ideal gender role questionnaire, and finally the demographic questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered to the participants in a group by the researcher in a classroom setting. Most of the students took 30 minutes to complete the questionnaires.

Measures

Personal gender roles. Participants' perceptions of their

personal gender roles were assessed using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1981b). Using a scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high), respondents rated how similar they were to the descriptors used. Twenty of the adjectives are personality traits that are traditional stereotypes of males, such as ambitious, self-reliant, independent, assertive. An additional 20 items are personality traits that are traditional stereotypes of females, such as affectionate, gentle, understanding, or sensitive to the needs of others. The remaining 20 items are filler items.

Participants' profiles from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory-Personal questionnaire were scored using a total score taken from the femininity and masculinity scales (FM scale). Whereas high scores indicate androgynous characteristics, low scores show sex-typed (masculine or feminine) characteristics. Participants high in androgynous characteristics are described as being more flexible in social situations, whereas individuals low in androgyny would be more sex-typed and rigid in their interactions.

Alpha scores for the masculinity scale was .84, while alpha scores for the femininity scale was .87.

Ideal gender roles. A modified form of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory was used to assess each students' perceptions of socially-stereotyped gender roles (ideal gender roles) by asking participants their attitudes regarding caracteristics which

define the ideal person in society. Respondents were asked to rate the same 20 stereotyped masculine descriptors and 20 stereotyped feminine descriptors based on their perception of the ideal person rather than for themselves.

Insert Table 2 Here

Participants' profiles from the Bem Sex-Role Inventory-Ideal questionnaire were scored using the total from the femininity and masculinity scales. High scores indicate that the societal ideal would have androgynous characteristics (high feminine and high masculine).

Alpha scores for the ideal masculinity scale was .89. Alpha scores for the ideal femininity scale was .84.

Demographic factors. Information on participants was obtained from self-report measures. Participants were asked to define the nature of their family system with the following question: "How would you be most likely to describe the status of your childhood family?" (intact, mother-headed single-parent, father-headed single-parent).

Results

Independent t-tests were run between paired participants from intact and single-parent families on demographic characteristics (gender, age, race, socieo-economic status) to

assure that differences in gender roles were attributable to individuals being reared in single-parent or intact families. No significant differences on gender identity were found based on gender, age, race, or socieo-economic status.

Five sets of analyses were carried out to test the five hypotheses under consideration: (1) that students reared in single-parent families would view their personal gender roles as being more androgynous than students reared in intact families, (2) that students reared in single-parent families value androgynous social ideals more than students reared in intact families, (3) that students reared in single-parent families would be more similar on personal and ideal gender roles than individuals reared in intact families, (4) that individuals reared in mother-headed families would view themselves (personal gender roles) in more androgynous ways than students reared in father-headed households, and (5) that individuals reared in mother-headed families would view the societal ideal (ideal gender roles) in more androgynous ways than students reared in father-headed households.

Differences between individuals on personal gender roles

In order to assess whether individuals reared in single-parent families held more androgynous personal gender role beliefs than individuals reared in intact families, a matched pair t-test was performed. A significant difference was found

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between students in intact versus single-parent families ($t(55)=6.98$, $p=.00$), with individuals from single-parent families showing higher levels of androgyny (see Table 3).

Differences between individuals on ideal gender roles

In order to assess whether individuals reared in single-parent families held more androgynous ideal gender role beliefs than individuals reared in intact families, a matched pair t-test was performed. There was a significant difference in levels of ideal gender role androgyny between students reared in intact versus single-parent families ($t(55)=3.14$, $p=.01$), with individuals from single-parent families showing higher levels of androgyny (see Table 3).

Differences between personal and ideal roles

To assess whether students reared in single-parent families had more similar personal and ideal gender roles than students reared in intact families, two matched t-tests were performed between personal and ideal scores for participants in both single-parent and intact families. A significant difference between the personal and ideal gender roles for individuals reared in single-parent families was found ($t(55)=4.20$, $p=.00$), showing higher levels of idealized androgyny. There no difference between personal and ideal roles for students reared in intact families ($t(55)=1.81$, $p=.20$)(see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 Here

Personal gender role differences between those reared in mother-headed and father-headed families

In order to assess whether individuals reared in mother-headed single-parent families held more androgynous personal gender role beliefs than individuals reared in father-headed single-parent families, a matched pair t-test was performed. Results showed that there was a significant difference between personal gender role scores for students reared in mother-headed and father-headed families ($t(12)=4.40$, $p=.04$)(see Table 3), with individuals from mother-headed families holding more androgynous roles.

Ideal gender role differences between those reared in mother-headed and father-headed families

In order to assess whether individuals reared in mother-headed single-parent families held more androgynous ideal gender role beliefs than individuals reared in father-headed single-parent families, a matched pair t-test was performed. Results showed that there was no significant difference between ideal androgyny scores for students reared in mother-headed and father-headed families ($t(12)=.30$, $p=.88$).(see Table 3).

Discussion

Differences for personal and ideal gender role beliefs were not found between individuals reared in single-parent and intact families. However, while students from single-parent homes saw the societal ideal as being evenly divided between sex-typed (masculine-feminine) and androgynous roles, students from intact homes were more apt to define themselves as sex-typed (masculine). That is to say, individuals reared in single-parent homes were more apt to categorize the societal ideal as androgynous. Further examination of the results revealed that females from intact families stereotyped the ideal person as feminine, whereas results for males from intact families revealed that stereotyped the ideal person as masculine.

Of further interest in this discussion is the presence of significant differences between personal and ideal roles for individuals from single-parent families, but no significant differences for individuals reared in intact families. These results indicate that individuals from single-parent families identify themselves as being different from the societal ideal, whereas individuals from intact homes do not. Since they are identified as sex-typed, individuals from intact families could be viewed as being more socially conforming. Students from intact homes appeared to be more limited in the ways in which they viewed themselves, others, and societal roles.

Individuals from single-parent families also viewed the idealized individual as being sex-typed. Differences between personal and ideal gender roles for students reared in single-parent homes is an indication that these individuals view themselves as being different from the societal norm.

The presence of androgynous personal schemas in individuals reared in single-parent homes may be related to the lack of sexually-stereotyped models in their immediate home environments. Such nonstereotypical ways of thinking (the definition of androgyny) are believed by Bem (1985) to improve their interactions and their adaptability in future environments. Sex-typed individuals from intact families, faced with changing familial and economic roles in an ever-diversifying world, may have more difficulty adapting to some situations than individuals from single-parent homes. Sex-typed thinking would challenge those from intact families, in that they would become selective of the information they attend to in others (ideal men are masculine, ideal women are feminine . . . without exception).

Individuals reared in mother-headed families held more androgynous personal gender role beliefs than individuals reared in father-headed families. No such differences could be determined for the ideal scales. In the present sample, only 13 father-headed families were examined. While the results are not highly reliable (due to sample size), individuals in mother-

headed families were more apt than individuals from father-headed families to define themselves as androgynous. It could be that mothers in singe-parent families are more apt to break social stereotypes as a result of their gender than fathers from single-parent families.

Further studies should be performed to identify the relations between a child's personal gender roles and those gender roles modeled in the home. It would be interesting to examine whether such differences in gender roles are identifyable in the behaviors of children from single-parent and intact families. It would also be interesting to note whether being androgynous or undifferentiated limits the social status of children from single-parent homes. To further understand how gender roles impact our relations in society holds promise as a diverse field of study. Future understanding of the dynamics of gender roles could improve the ways in which we relate with others, identify individuals, and discriminate between people.

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Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages for Pairs of Participants' Gender, Family Status, Ethnicity, and Age

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	41	73
Male	15	27
TOTAL	56 Pairs	100
Race	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Caucasian	37	66
African-American	16	29
Asian-American	3	5
TOTAL	56 Pairs	100
Age	**Frequency**	**Percent**
College-Aged	44	79
Post-College Aged	12	21
TOTAL	56 Pairs	100
Income	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Lower Income	27	46
Middle Income	14	26
Upper Income	15	28
TOTAL	56 Pairs	100

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for BSRI Scales

	Mean(S.D.)	Min	Max
Personal Androgyny (M+F)			
Single-Parent	102.25(15.46)	68	155
Intact	83.16(14.59)	56	134
Ideal Androgyny (M+F)			
Single-Parent	113.73(21.68)	75	154
Intact	100.66(19.41)	67	144

Table 3

Results of Matched Samples t-tests (n=56)

pair	mean(sd)	t	df	sig. level
Personal Androgyny Single	102.25(15.46)			
Personal Androgyny Intact	83.16(14.59)	6.98	55	.00 **
Ideal Androgyny Single	113.73(21.68)			
Ideal Androgyny Intact	100.66(19.42)	3.14	55	.00 **
Personal Androgyny Intact	83.16(14.59)			
Ideal Androgyny Intact	100.66(19.42)	1.81	55	.20
Personal Androgyny Single	102.25(15.46)			
Ideal Androgyny Single	113.73(21.68)	4.20	55	.01 **
Personal Androgyny Single Mother	104.33 (13.32)			
Personal Androgyny Single Father	98.89 (17.76)	4.40	12	.04 *
Ideal Androgyny Single Mother	101.03 (8.65)			
Ideal Androgyny Single Father	100.64 (11.54)	.30	12	.88

* $p > .05$
** $p > .01$